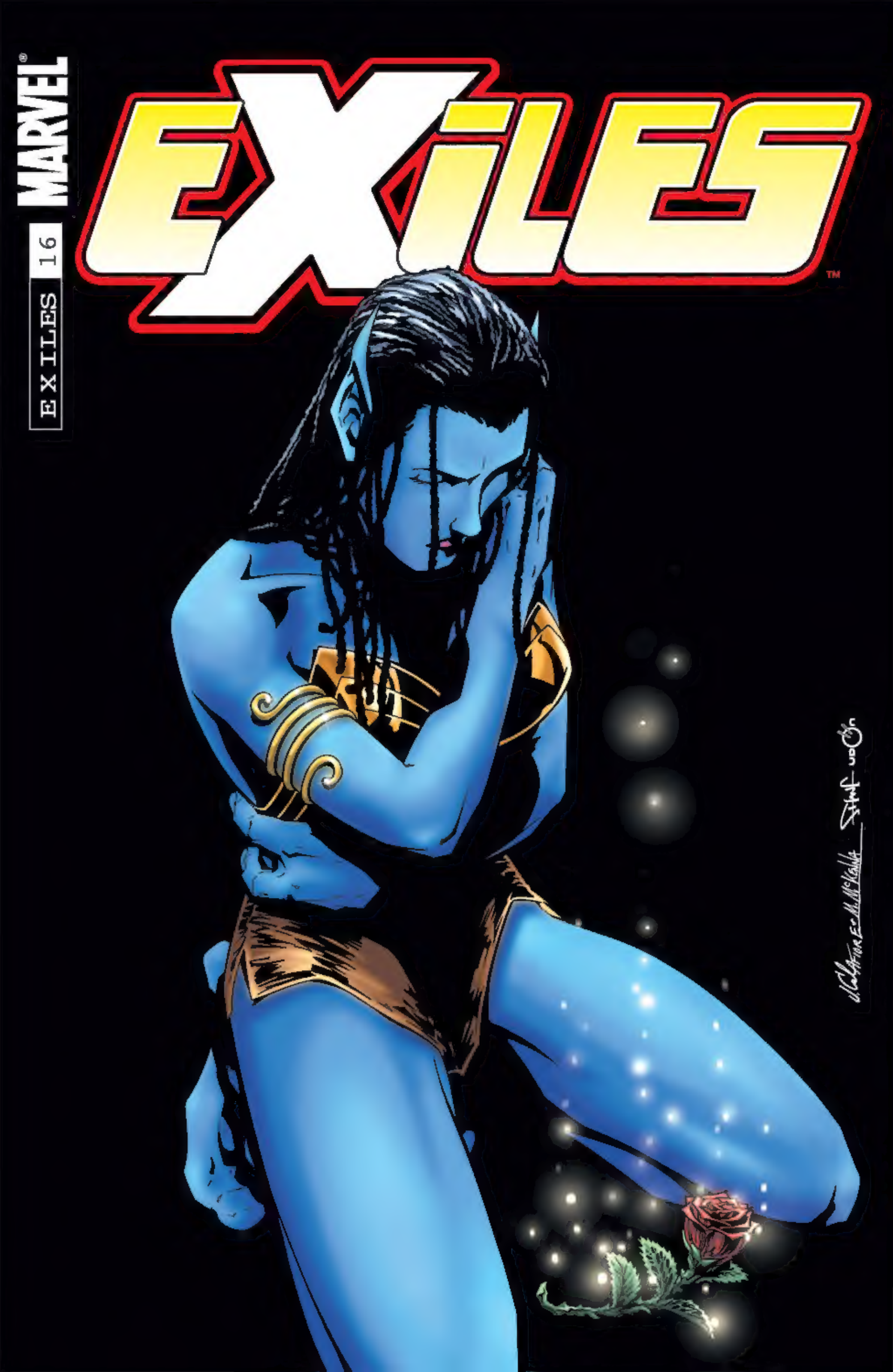
MARVEL®

EXILES 16

EXILES™



NOOOOO!

No-no-no-no-no-no-no!

A while back, in a reality where the Skrulls ruled the Earth for over a century.

Where Galactus came to feed on the planet.

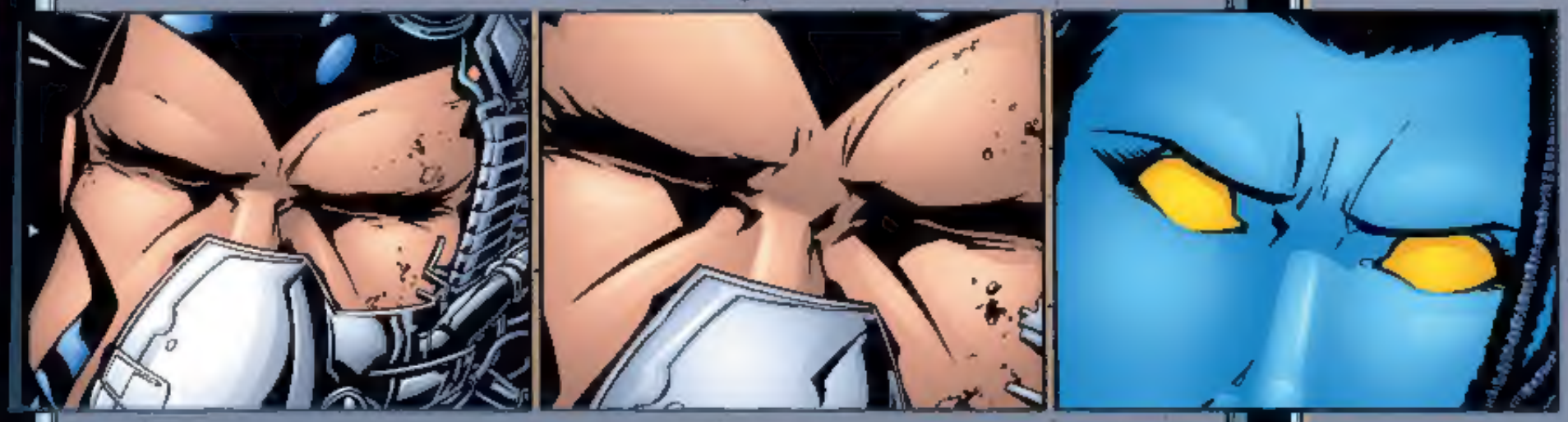
Where the world's heroes, led by the Exiles-- defeated their would-be destroyer.

Please! NO!

At the price of one of their own.

John-- John-- please! Noooo!!!

JOOOOOOOOHNNNN--



Many worlds later...

Talia Josephine Wagner!

Throw on your party thong-- we are all gonna get big, fat, *crazy!*

CLUCK -U- -HICKEN

PARTY NAKED

GO AWAY

Well, not *that* crazy. *Medium* crazy.

Okay, *small* crazy. But like *cappuccino*-- small and full of *pep*.

PARTY ALMOST NAKED

The gang-- and when I say *gang*, one could take that *literally*-- we are a *team* of nomadic *super monkeys*--

--we beat people up *all* the time--

--we *hang*.

That's *a gang*.

Anyway, we're going to get room service and watch pay movies.

I was hoping one of those talking animal movies, but the ladies are *demanding* we watch *porn*.

So, *c'mon*. Chicken fingers and pornography. You coming?

NO.

Seriously, TJ... come on over. It'll be fun.

No.

TJ...

What did I say, Morph?

Yeah. Okay.
Hey... listen... I know it's not in the *ballpark* of where your...
...well... if it means anything to say...
I miss him, too.
If you change your mind... y'know...

Long ago. Twelve hours before the Exiles participated in the Battle of Phoenix.

Hello, Nocturne.

You like these flowers, huh?

I like *most* flowers, Nocturne.

You don't seem like the type, T-bird.

I suppose. Just me and *Ferdinand the Bull*, I guess.

But Ferdinand was *afraid* to be in the bullfights, right? That doesn't seem to be your problem.

Ferdinand wasn't *scared*. He *preferred* to lie in the fields and smell the flowers.

There's a *difference*.

You seem to know *a lot* about Ferdinand the Bull.

My *mother* liked it. I think she enjoyed the idea of a *docile* beast. Between my father, my brother and myself, *well...*

Not a lot of *feminine energy* floating around the Proud-star household, huh?

I'd say there was a *black hole* of *testoster-one* sucking out any and all other forms of life.

Sounds like *fun.*

It *was.* Like *The Great Santini* except with *alcohol* and *hunting.*

What are you *smiling* at?

You. You are being *funny* and hence I smiled. It happens sometimes, John.

Ah. I'll have to watch out for that.

You do that

Th s one smells ike *bread.*

Uh-huh. Try t.

Really?

Their next mission. A new reality

The Team found itself in Canada, teaming up with Alpha Flight and hunting the Hulk.

My father didn't care so much-- he saw the value in me attend ng a public high school. It was uncle *Logan* who was having puppies.

That *man*-- he wou d throw himself into a *pit of acid,* fi ed with acid resistant vamp re *piranha* that hadn t been fed for a *year* to get someone out of a jam--

--but me attend ng Kennedy High-- you'd th nk I was vo unteering to carry *Brood Eggs* n my butt.

Brood Eggs in your butt. Charming. You've been hanging out with *Morph* too much.

Morph thinks you *hate* him.

I *do* hate him.

Oh c'mon-- he's *funny*. I know, I know-- he *never* stops talking, but he bats about five hundred on the funny.

I don't really *hate* Morph.

I just envy him.

Yeah?

Sure. He's *free*.

I can't imagine what that's like.

After T Bird brought down the Hulk.

You are a *rock star!* A *massive,* hundred thousand seat coliseum, heavy-weight @#$%& *rock* star!

You knocked out the *Hulk!*

The Hulk who was at a *diminished* strength because he was *separated* from Bruce Banner.

John! Don't *ruin* it. It's still cool. The *Hulk,* baby. The biggest of the *big! No one is mightier than the Hulk! Except John Proudstar!*

I suppose...

John... how *weird* is it meeting... an *alternate* version of *yourself?*

This John Proudstar, *Shaman* of Alpha Flight.

It's *odd...*

. I look at him and I see... well, not *me,* but a *me* that I *couldn't* become. It's hard.

As strange as it is to say-- he's a *good* guy.

I'm *glad* I could meet him.

It sort of felt like having my brother *James* around... in a way...

How well did you know my brother James?

Very well.

How well?

He was my *boyfriend.*

Oh.

What's he *like?*

James
James is a *lot* like you but *completely* different. As an X-Man-- he's brave, smart in the field, a leader.

He's also a stubborn *ass*. We argued a lot. Not about anything important... just *fought*. He couldn't *ever* let me get the last word, he could never admit he was *wrong*...

Do you miss him?

I suppose.

Do you?

He's... *dead* in your reality?

Yes. He was a good boy.

And *yes*, a stubborn ass

I miss him *very* much.

For *me*. Maybe the *next* one is for *you*

Um... what was *that* for?

Don't.

Weeks later.

A reality where the Savage Land covers an entire continent.

Why *don't*? Why *shouldn't* we?

We're not... we're not *doing* this *again*... with *our* lives being what they are, so *unpredictable*, so unsure... we *shouldn't*.

Blink and *Mimic* don't seem to think so. They're a full-fledged *couple* and they *lead* the team

Blink and Mimic are being *stupid* and immature.

Look at our lives! This *isn't* a time to bind yourself up in emotional entanglements.

At *any* moment one of us could finish our missions and be sent home. We could be *injured*. We could be *killed*. It could all be over in an *instant*.

I *refuse* to let myself seek *distractions* from our plight. I'd rather just face what we go through without looking for some... *refuge*

Refuge... a distraction?

No. You've made yourself clear. You *uptight* c#s%

Wait, Talia that *isn't* what I meant at *all*... I *just*--

Talia!

Stop calling me *Talia!*

What do you *want*, John?

I just want to talk for a *minute*, TJ

Later

In a reality where the Exiles served under President Tony Stark

Last week back at the lagoon--

--I was being unfair to Calvin and Clarice. I don't *know* what they have... I just...

..TJ... I wouldn't want to be with you if it was... *transient*...

Fine. *What?*

It's hard *enough* to be in this thing-- to be an *Exile*. Every aspect of our lives is just piles and piles of *uncertainty*... and

..that's *crap*... that's *not* the reason...

..God... I just...

What the hell do you want with *me* anyway?

John...

I'm a *monster.*

John...

Look at me.

Look at me, *damn* it!

I'm *barely* a human being

You... you're *beautiful... free...* everything about you. You're...

...if you were in your home reality, you *wouldn't* have to settle for a half ton of twisted cyborg executioner

You'd be with *James.* Or with *anybody.* Anyone *normal.* Someone beautiful... like *you.*

You deserve better than something like *me.*

I am lucky-- *so* lucky-- that I found you.

And I don't *want* anyone else.

On the Skrull World.

Before the end...

I can't think of a *worse* time for this...

Yeah.

Are you *sure?*

Yeah. I'm sure.

You're pregnant?

Yes. I'm sure.

Why are you *smiling?*

I can't help it.

You're carrying our *baby.*

John, what are we going to do?

Fight.

Fight to stay alive. Fight to stay together.

Fight to... to find the day where I can read the baby the story of *Ferdinand*. The big beast who likes to smell flowers.

You're *so* sappy.

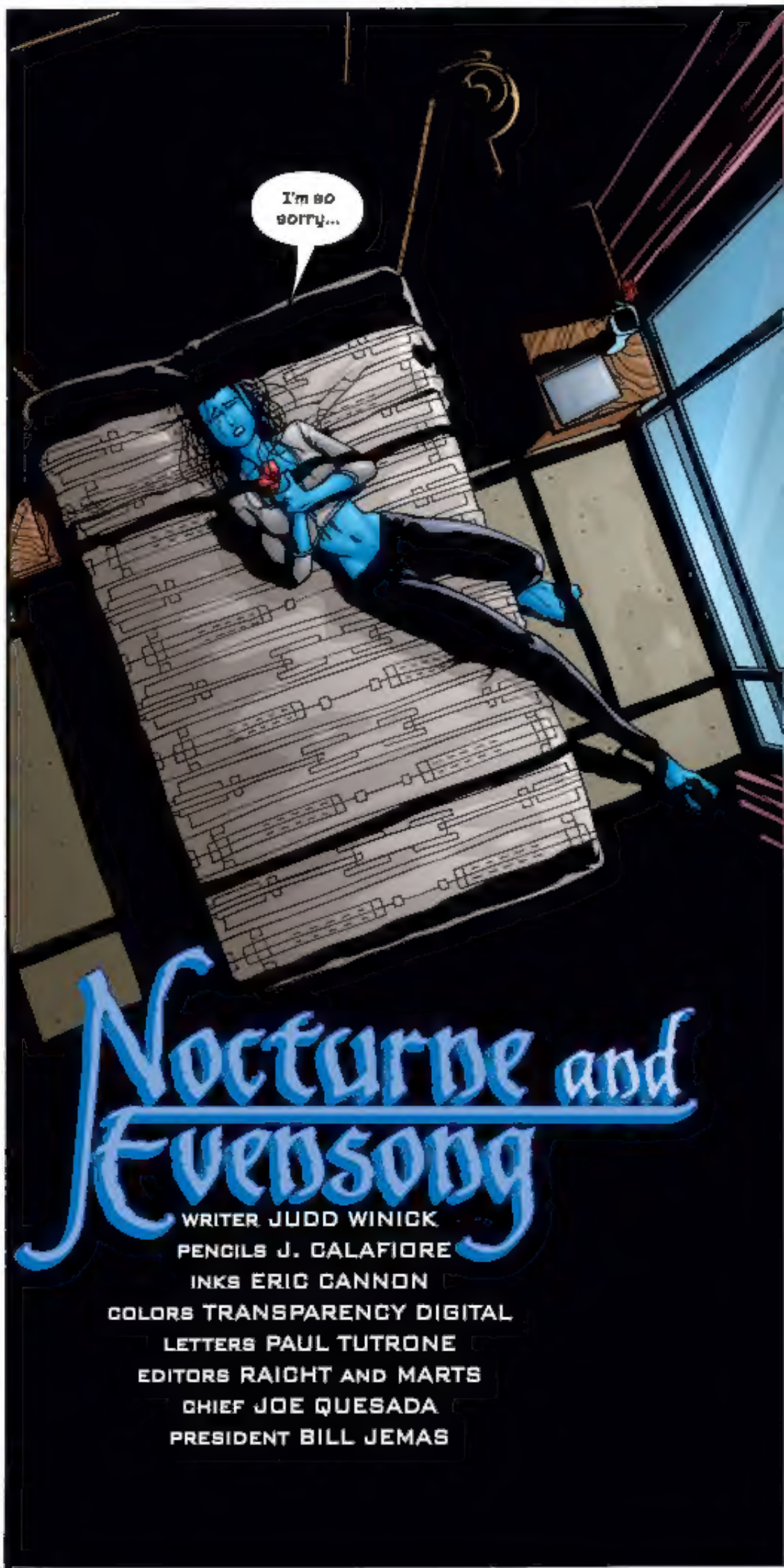
True.

I hope it's a *boy*.

You *would*...

Today.
After John.

I just couldn't fight without you.


I'm so sorry...
Nocturne and Evensong
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